

Governing Energy

The Guns of August

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President John Kennedy is purported to have required that all of his Cabinet members read the book, *The Guns of August*.ⁱ This series has addressed this book previously from the standpoint that events can overrun any set of decision makers; *It Must Be Spring*, April 16, 2013.

There are other lessons to learn from the author, Barbara Tuchman.ⁱⁱ In 1914 the world sped headlong into the greatest tragedy (then to date) mankind had ever seen. Great monarchies fell, Communism cemented hold and the stage was set for an even greater calamity a mere 20 years later.

Bottom line—communication between parties was shall we say, impaired. Talking past each other, making stereotypical assumptions combined with the hubris of an early version of the *me generation*, great powers ended in a military conflict using nineteenth century tactics against twentieth century technology (machine guns).ⁱⁱⁱ

Caught in this no man's land, millions of troops and civilians on the ground paid the early price, while the generals and political operatives paid later. Many in both groups paid the ultimate price and all paid dearly. One can argue that 99 years later, the influence of that conflict remains.

Most of us are not leading armies into battle or making *bet-your-country* decisions. However, most of us make *bet-your-company* decisions on a regular basis and *bet-your-career* decisions almost daily.

Ill-informed assumptions without supporting relevant and timely data have often led to ruin. Ms Tuchman's message is that if it can happen to the so-called elites, who many believed to be the best and the brightest, it can happen to all of us.

How does your organization assure that the guns of August aren't pointed inward?

About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the Managing Director of The Rapid Response Institute; a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management.

End Notes

ⁱ <http://pulitzerpalaver.blogspot.com/2009/12/guns-of-august-winner-non-fiction-1963.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.loa.org/volume.jsp?RequestID=356>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://lists.project-wombat.org/pipermail/project-wombat-fm-project-wombat.org/2012-October/002432.html>